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ABSTRACT

The question of race among Puerto Ricans in the United States in the 20th century is explored in this paper. The multiracial character of Puerto Ricans is examined by reviewing Puerto Rico's migration history. Eighteen major works written between 1917 and 1971 on Puerto Ricans are reviewed to discern common racial themes. The methodology of the major works reviewed is analyzed and seven themes found in the literature are discussed. There are: (1) the question of whether Puerto Ricans are a race or not; (2) the continuum of racial types among Puerto Ricans and corresponding names for these types; (3) the generally more "benign" quality of race relations in Puerto Rico; (4) the harsher racial climate in the United States; (5) personal prejudice and the prejudice of no prejudice in Puerto Rico; (6) the theme of "mistaken identity;" and (7) anticipated assimilation paths. These themes reflect the ongoing conflict of two different racial classification systems, that of the United States and that of Puerto Rico. Six endnotes and 35 references are included. (Author/DB)

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Puerto Ricans:

A Multi-Racial Group In a Bi-Racial Country

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Abstract

This paper explores the question of race among Puerto Ricans in the U. S. in the 20th century. It first examines the multiracial character of Puerto Ricans by reviewing Puerto Rico's migration history. It then examines 18 major works written between 1917 and 1971 on Puerto Ricans to discern common racial themes. The methodology of the major works reviewed is analyzed and seven themes in this literature are discussed. These are: (1) the question of whether Puerto Ricans are a race or not; (2) the continuum of racial types among Puerto Ricans and corresponding names for these types; (3) the generally more "benign" quality of race relations in Puerto Rico; (4) the harsher racial climate in the United States; (5) personal prejudice and the prejudice of no prejudice in Puerto Rico; (6) the theme of "mistaken identity;" and (7) anticipated assimilation paths. It is argued that these themes reflect the on-going conflict of different racial classification systems, i.e., that in the U. S. and in Puerto Rico.

Introduction*

Puerto Ricans are the first racially heterogenous, but culturally homogenous group, to arrive en masse to the United States. The U. S.'s biracial view of race confronted Puerto Rican (im)migrants who arrived with racial attitudes and mixtures quite different from those in existence in the U. S. and which reflected Puerto Rico's greater racial mixture and tolerance.[1] The migration of Puerto Ricans to the U. S. thus presents us with an opportunity to examine the historical conflicts that arose as a result of the clash between two opposing racial classification systems. This historical experience provides insights into the experience of similar but newer immigrants to the U. S., e.g., Central & South Americans, North Africans, and East Indians.

There have been Puerto Ricans and Puerto Rican organizations in the U. S. since the nineteenth century. However, it was only after Puerto Rico was ceded to the U. S. as a result of the war with Spain in 1898, that significant numbers of Puerto Ricans came to the U. S. It was after the Second World War that the bulk of the (im)migrants arrived, with the greatest numbers arriving in the fifties. Today, there are 2.562 million Puerto Ricans residing in the U.S. and another 3.270 million in Puerto Rico. Together they constituted 28.86% of all Hispanics within U. S. borders in 1985. (Rodriguez, 1989:28)

This paper reviews the migration history of Puerto Rico. It then examines 18 major works written between 1917 and 1971 on

Puerto Ricans. Within this literature, it finds seven major racial themes that reflect the on-going clash of competing racial classification systems. The methodology of the major works reviewed is analyzed. Finally, each of the themes that emerged from these works is discussed. The themes are: (1) the question of whether Puerto Ricans are a race or not; (2) the continuum of racial types among Puerto Ricans and corresponding names for these types; (3) the generally more "benign" quality of race relations in Puerto Rico; (4) the harsher racial climate in the United States; (5) personal prejudice and the prejudice of no prejudice in Puerto Rico; (6) the theme of "mistaken identity;" and (7) anticipated assimilation paths.

Puerto Rico's Migration History

497 years ago, Columbus landed on an island then called "Boriquen" by the Tainos who lived there. Soon after the island was to be called "San Juan Bautista" and then "Puerto Rico" by Spain. The indigenous people were to disappear by the end of the 16th century. The island continued to receive colonists from Spain and slaves from Africa. Fearing the settlers would leave the island for the newly discovered gold and silver mines in Mexico and Peru, Spain placed immigration restrictions on colonists. In the 19th century, Spain liberalized its policies with regard to trade, immigration and political rights. Puerto Rico became a bustling trade center, as well as host to thousands of arriving immigrants. The population grew from 70,250 in 1775 to 330,051 in 1832. By the end of the nineteenth century the population had multiplied more

than 13 times. (Rodriguez, 1989)

The diversity of its population also grew. Although the bulk of the nineteenth-century immigrants came from Spain and its possessions, there are indications that a great many came from other European countries (Cifre de Loubriel, 1960). The present-day linguistic diversity of common Puerto Rican surnames reflects the varied origins of the migrants of the nineteenth century: Colberg, Wiscovitch, Petrovitch, Franqui, Adams, Solivan. Both African slaves legally owned by Puerto Ricans and runaway slaves continued to arrive until 1873, when slavery was officially abolished.

Puerto Rico's situation with regard to slavery and race relations was unusual. As Eric Williams (1970), distinguished historian and specialist in West Indian politics, points out, "The Puerto Rican situation was unique in the Caribbean, in that not only did the white population outnumber the people of color, but the slaves constituted an infinitesimal part of the total population and free labor predominated during the regime of slavery." (p.280) Slaves running away had been allowed to earn a wage since 1750. By the time Puerto Rico legally abolished slavery, free Negroes outnumbered slaves on the island.

With a diversified economy based mainly on small farming, Puerto Rico did not have the same need for slave labor as other islands with large plantation economies. Because of its non-planation economy, Puerto Rico may have been seen as a less profitable, less wealthy colony. But if "Puerto Rico, by the

conventional standards of the final quarter of the nineteenth century, ranked as one of the most backward sectors of the Caribbean economy, in intellectual perspective it was head and shoulders above its neighbors" (Williams, 1970: 292). Puerto Rico argued in cogent economic terms for the superiority of free labor over slave labor. This position distinguished it from other colonial possessions.

Thus, early on Puerto Rico distinguished itself with regard to its attitudes toward race. It evolved a unique racial ambience. Although this ambience was similar to that in other parts of Latin America, it was quite distinct from that which existed in the United States when Puerto Ricans first migrated to the U. S.[2] Some important points of difference involve the conception of race in Puerto Rico as (1) a continuum instead of as discrete categories (2) the use of criteria other than genotype or blood quantum to determine race, e.g., phenotype, hair texture and features, and social class and (3) the subsuming of race to culture in determining identity. Thus, when Puerto Ricans migrated to the United States, they not only constituted part of the first significant multiracial migration to the U. S., they also brought unique differences in racial conceptions.

The Clash of Race Orders

Thus, Puerto Ricans entered the U. S. with different perceptions of race, and as a multiracial group. They entered a U. S. society that had a biologically-based, biracial structure and that had tended to accommodate multiracial cultural groups into

this structure. The U. S. racial structure assumed a white-notwhite division of the world. Euroamerican Whites were at one end of this polarity and African Blacks were at the other. Groups, such as Asians and Native American Indians, who had also been in the U. S. since its earliest beginnings, occupied ambiguous "grey" positions within this dichotomy. They were not white, they were not black. Historical events, and the geographic distribution and isolation of these groups, made these groups' racial position less salient in the public mind than the basic white - black dichotomy. Latinos, not being totally black or totally white, occupied an ambiguous racial status.[3]

The unique racial history and perspective of Puerto Ricans were to be a significant factors in their experience in the U. S. The presence of these factors are to be found in the literature on, and of, the migration. This literature illustrates the conflicts that arise when a multiracial group migrates to an essentially biracial country. It also illuminates many of the difficulties other similarly multi-racial groups may experience when migrating from one racial environment to another. It reflects the conflict of racial classification systems and the problems that flow from this conflict.[4]

In the following review, it should be noted that many of the studies focused exclusively on men or merged men and women. Thus, the themes discussed pertain to Puerto Ricans as a whole, unless otherwise noted. The major focus is also on 18 works written during the early period of the migration, when Puerto Ricans were

relative newcomers and when issues of race were not yet affected by the subsequent and substantial changes introduced by the Black power movement.[5] However, other sources will be alluded to as well in discussion of the themes identified in these earlier works.

The Major Works Reviewed and Their Methodologies

With the exception of three Puerto Ricans, Padilla (1958), Gosnell (1945), and Lopez (1973) most of the works reviewed here were done by North American social scientists, who used a variety of descriptive, ethnographic and survey research methods. For example, Mills, et. al. (1950) and Tumin and Feldman (1961) used a fairly structured survey approach, with Mills emphasizing participant observation as well. Both of these survey studies involved over 1000 respondents. Padilla (1958) and Gosnell (1945)'s community studies also used structured interviews, participant observation, and had considerable numbers in their samples. But they appear to have also investigated more qualitative sources than Mills, et. al. (1950) and Tumin & Feldman (1961). Padilla (1958), for example, included the diaries and personal experiences of the interviewers and workers; and, Gosnell (1945) made many references to the literature and popular culture of Puerto Ricans. Chenault (1970), the earliest recorder of the Puerto Rican community cited here, used a mixture of secondary sources, e.g., census reports, data from the Puerto Rico Dept. of Labor, the Emergency Relief Bureau of NYC, the New York City Housing Authority, the Dept. of Health, and newspapers. He also interviewed social workers and those in close contact with the

group; finally he indicates he also had "experiences of life" in Puerto Rico and in NYC. Fitzpatrick (1971) and Handlin (1962) also approached their study of Puerto Ricans (and Blacks in the case of Handlin) in a similar multifaceted manner.

Petrullo (1958) and Rand (1958), on the other hand, present rather journalistic accounts. Indeed, Petrullo says, "To make it readable I have avoided full documentation and detailed discussion of minutiae." (Preface, p. v). While Rand calls his study "a sociologist's objective view" but cites no methodology or other significant documentation. A working journalist, his narrative weaves in and out of what he heard or read about Puerto Ricans from others. There are a number of works that stand somewhere between these two extremes. They combine a variety of sources and make reference to information derived from survey information and questionnaires that others have gathered (e.g., Senior, 1961; Glazer & Moynihan, 1970), or, they take the form of essays (e.g., G. Lewis, 1963; Lopez, 1973). Lastly, there are the fieldwork and community studies, which were mainly done in Puerto Rico and which also range from the life history approaches taken by O. Lewis (1968) and Mintz (1960) to the more extensive fieldwork studies of La Ruffa (1971), Landy (1965) and Steward (1956).

Racial Themes in the Literature

A reading of these works yields a number of common themes that speak to the issue of race. (1) One theme has been the question of whether Puerto Ricans are a race or a multiracial society. Although this has been a constant question, it has not yielded a

definitive answer. There are other themes that have elicited more general agreement. These are: (2) that there exists a continuum of racial types and a corresponding nomenclature for these types among Puerto Ricans; (3) that there is a generally more "benign" quality of race relations in Puerto Rico; and (4) that darker Puerto Ricans experience negative social and economic consequences upon migrating to the U. S. There are also areas and themes where there has been disagreement. (5) For example, despite the general consensus on the insignificance of race in institutional treatment, there has been some disagreement on how salient or significant race is on other more personal levels, while one author has asked whether Puerto Ricans have a hypersensitivity to color. (6) The next theme, found most often in the fictional literature, is that of "mistaken identity," i.e., being identified racially instead of culturally. (7) The last theme, that of anticipated assimilation paths, essentially is the prediction of many scholars that Puerto Ricans would come to accept the racial attitudes of the U. S. and divide into white and black Puerto Ricans. Some of the themes pertain to race on the island, while others are specific to the experience of Puerto Ricans in the U. S. Each of these themes is discussed below.

The Puerto Rican Race?

One theme in the literature that has spanned both the island and the states has been the debate about whether Puerto Ricans are a race or a multiracial society. Gosnell (1945:180ff) in her early study of Puerto Ricans in New York noted the persistent (and by

then historical) debate that existed in Puerto Rico concerning the racial composition of Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico. While Petrullo (1958) in his study of Puerto Rico devotes a chapter to the question of "The Puerto Rican 'Race'". He concludes, "There is no Puerto Rican race, but there are white and black Puerto Ricans and all sorts of mixtures in between." (p. 14) This issue of the percentage distribution of whites and blacks among Puerto Ricans has also been touched upon by most social scientists researching Puerto Ricans. In point of fact, despite historical intermixing, Puerto Ricans are not a race; they are a cultural group. The debate is fueled by the tendency to view Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans from the North American racial perspective, i.e., to want to see them as within one racial group -- white or notwhite -- and not from the Latin American perspective which has more than two categories.

Continuum of Racial Types

The racial classification system in Puerto Rico has more in common with the Latin American conception of race than with the U. S. conception. Thus, in Puerto Rico there is a continuum of racial types. The fact that this system is quite different from the U. S. racial system has led many researchers to comment on it. Thus, in the literature there has been general agreement on the existence of a continuum of racial types and a corresponding nomenclature for them. (Gosnell, 1945; Padilla, E., 1958; Steward, 1956; Landy, 1965; LaRuffa, 1971; Mills, 1950; Fitzpatrick, 1971; Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Mintz, 1960) The general categories noted in

Puerto Rico are "blanca/o" (white), "india/o" (similar to the U. S. conception of Asian Indians, i.e., dark-skinned and straight-haired), "morena/o" (dark skinned and with a variety of Negroid or Caucasian features; "negra/o" (equivalent to very black, Black Americans in the U. S.) and "triguena/o" a term that can be applied to each of the foregoing groups except very blond, European-type blancos. The term "negra/o" is also commonly used as a term of endearment without any racial connotation. Where each of these categories ends and another begins is vague and there is not always complete agreement on this. (Ginorio and Berry, 1972).[4] This way of viewing people stands in sharp contrast to the bi-racial polarity of the U. S.

The Quality of Race Relations in Puerto Rico

In the literature, there has also been general agreement that the quality of race relations in Puerto Rico is superior to that in the United States. Again, the differences between the two racial contexts have been evident to researchers. The majority of North American social scientists who have studied the island have found race relations within the body politick to be rather "benign" and somewhat unimportant (Chenault, 1970; Glazer & Moynihan, 1970; Petrullo, 1947; Mintz, 1960; Steward, 1956 and Giles, et. al., 1979). Some authors have argued that color was also less important to Puerto Ricans in social and family relations than was the case in the United States (Chenault, 1970; Glazer & Moynihan, 1970:142). Despite this general consensus on the insignificance of race in institutional treatment, authors have disagreed on whether there

is extreme color consciousness, covert racism, or simply a preference for whiteness among Puerto Ricans. For example, Steward (1956:291), Landy (1965), G. Lewis (1963:424), and Tumin & Feldman (1961:228) argue that Puerto Ricans in Puerto Rico are very conscious of race, especially skin color. While Laruffa (1971) argues there is covert racism on the island especially toward Africanisms, and Padilla (1958:74) states that it is to your advantage to look white in Puerto Rico. In summary, there is agreement on the relatively more benign nature of race relations in Puerto Rico as compared with the U. S. There is less agreement on how important race is for Puerto Ricans on more personal levels.

Prejudice in Puerto Rico

Given what has been generally agreed to be a more benign racial climate in Puerto Rico, the issue of whether prejudice exists has been greatly debated. Some authors have argued that "Puerto Ricans seem to have developed a Creole ethos tolerant of the mulatto group...but scornful of the black sector..." (Duany, 1985:30, see also Zenon Cruz, 1975; and Longres, 1974:68ff) While Betances (1972) has argued that in Puerto Rico there is a "prejudice of no prejudice" in Puerto Rico and that this in itself constitutes a prejudicial act. Zenon Cruz (1975) has argued that there are specific prejudices against Africanisms in Puerto Rico and that there is a depreciation of negritude.

Other rather complex and still debated questions have been raised concerning the question of prejudice in Puerto Rico. For example: Have Indian and African elements been destroyed or

integrated into the Puerto Rican society? Is the race issue in Puerto Rico dealt with by ignoring it, or is it really not an issue? Is it necessary for harmonious "race" relations that all Puerto Ricans have some African ancestry? Are the prejudices against Africanisms in Puerto Rico an American import (Movimiento Pro Independencia, 1963)? Is there an unrecognized color gradient as one moves up the income scale in Puerto Rico (Pico de Hernandez, et. al., 1975)? If so, is this due to Puerto Rican preferential policies for light Puerto Ricans, discriminatory policies against Blacks, inequalities inherited from slavery days or the result of American imperialism? Is the whole debate over whether there is prejudice in Puerto Rico the result of a colonialized mentality? Many of these questions have their genesis in the interaction with the U. S. They all indicate the complexity of the race issue in Puerto Rico.

Hypersensitivity to Color

An interesting perspective is presented by Lewis, G. (1963) who sees the racial mixture as having produced a massive complex of color psychology "with serious results both for the quality of self-esteem and of social life." (p.225) He agrees there is no overt racism but says there is a very real sense of color snobbishness based on the awareness of "shades." The whitening or bleaching phenomena that some attribute to racial transformation in Latin America is seen by Lewis as a problem, for it implies that self appraisal revolves around whether or not individuals are able to garner the recognition necessary to be whitened. If this is the

case, then migrants to New York may have brought a heightened sensitivity to color and race that became all the more acute with the sharp, biologically-based, segregation existent in the states and with the significant changes wrought by the Black power movement. Fitzpatrick (1971) alluded to this when he said that the Puerto Rican's problem with color in New York was "a concern which was already present but in a much different context in Puerto Rico." The collision of racial structures may have been exacerbated by this.

Racial Consequences in the U. S.

What happened when Puerto Ricans came to the states? The literature on Puerto Ricans in the United States takes note of the many difficulties that resulted because of race. Chenault (1970), speaking of the pre World War II community said that instances of difficulty on account of color were frequent. While Steward (1956:127) said "An outsider cannot easily tell how the color line works in Puerto Rico but there seems no doubt that dark skin is a worse handicap in New York than there, and that realization of this can shock the dark-skinned migrant." The negative economic consequences for dark Puerto Ricans in New York were noted by a number of authors. Mills (1950:72-74)) found that in the late 50s "colored" or intermediate men, i.e., those who would be defined as "indios" and "grifos" in Puerto Rico, earned less than white men and experienced less mobility.[5] Mills also found that all women entered the labor force in roughly similar proportions; however, a higher proportion of white women than "colored" women tended to

be students. Senior (1961) found somewhat later that in New York the "colored" Puerto Ricans had a problem getting jobs. While Katzman (1968) using 1950 census data found Negro Puerto Ricans to be more underemployed and underpaid than white Puerto Ricans but to have few differences with regard to white collar employment.

According to the literature, early on there seemed to be an awareness of the harshness of the U. S. race order on particularly darker Puerto Ricans. A number of authors make reference to what they perceive to be selective migration patterns -- that is to say, a tendency for more white Puerto Ricans to migrate to New York than dark Puerto Ricans (Chenault, 1970:60-61; Senior, 1961:28; Petrullo, 1947:23). They also took note of a tendency among the "colored," i.e., the intermediate and Negro Puerto Ricans, to want to return to Puerto Rico and to be more cautious about staying in New York (Mills, 1950:48; Senior, 1961:28). Chenault (1970:24) observed early on that "the colored" find less discrimination on the island than in the U. S.

In the housing area, there was also note made of the difficulties experienced because of race. As Senior (1961:28) noted: "When he comes to the states, the Puerto Rican newcomer who is colored may experience his first difficulty getting a job or finding a place to live because of his color." He became according to Senior (1961) a minority within a minority. Earlier indications of residential patterning according to race had also been noted by Chenault 1970:127 who observed a tendency in the pre World War II period for "colored Puerto Ricans" to live in E.

Harlem and for color to be an important determinant of whether they could move into the more white area of Washington Heights. (p.92) Similarly, in the 1940s Gosnell (1945:313) noted some residential patterning according to the race of Puerto Ricans and a tendency for some Puerto Ricans to "pass for white" in white areas. Thus, residence early on was significantly affected by "race."

Less visible, but nonetheless, just as significant were the social and psychological changes experienced as a result of race. These too were duly noted in the early literature on the Puerto Rican community in the U. S. Gosnell (1945:310-11), for example, noted that in NYC the "traditional pride in white descent" was intensified. While Padilla (1958:75ff) -- looking at the Puerto Rican in New York a decade later and through a similar ethnographic study -- found that while in Puerto Rico social race was subordinate to social class, in New York, social race was central to Hispanic life and important in mobility. She also noted the use of whiteness for upward mobility in New York. Mills (1950:7) also noted the concern of the migrants with proving that they were white, while Lopez (1980) was to argue later that Puerto Ricans had internalized race prejudice toward others and themselves.

Psychological Impact

Some speculation about the impact of race on mental health is also to be found in the literature. For example, Berle (1958) noted that Black Puerto Ricans seemed to predominate among Puerto Rican drug addicts. Malzberg (1967) noted that more Puerto Rican blacks were admitted to NYS psychiatric hospitals than non-black

Puerto Ricans. Teichner, et. al. (1981:281) made reference to the need to address the racial problems of Puerto Ricans in the treatment of psychiatric illness. While Longres (1974:67) said "Psychologically, the most damaging experience encountered by a Puerto Rican continental is an encounter with racist attitudes." He argued that this undermined "the sense of autonomy and initiative brought by the migrating Puerto Rican" and left "a residue of self-doubt and inadequacy." (p.67) He saw this problem as a collective problem affecting all Puerto Ricans; a problem that was detrimental to individual mental health as well as to social cohesion. At the base of this problem was the experience of being forced to identify according to the socially defined racial standards of the U. S., thereby confronting and questioning their own racial identity.

Being classified according to U. S. racial standards has meant being identified racially instead of culturally; this has meant for many being reclassified into a different culture. This reclassification experience and its consequences has been a persistent theme in the fictional and autobiographical literature of the migration; it has been termed "mistaken identity." (Rodriguez, 1989) It is an experience that has affected Puerto Ricans of all colors. It is found in the memoirs and literary works of the Puerto Rican migration, e.g., in the Memorias de Bernardo Vega, Colon's A Puerto Rican in New York, Thomas' Down These Mean Streets and Rivera's Family Installments. The most oft-cited experience is that of the darker Puerto Rican who is taken

to be Negro, colored, or Black.

However, the perplexing situation of the Puerto Rican who is viewed as white is a complementary experience that similarly yields confusion, anger, and a clear awareness of group divisions. As for example in the stories retold by Colon (1961), where the white looking daughter cannot meet her darker mother at her work place because the people she works for don't like colored people; or when only the white Puerto Ricans in an extended family will be served at a segregated restaurant in the pre-sixties period; or, as Vega notes, when an apartment is rented to a white-looking member of the family, and when the others arrive, they all become the object of discrimination (Iglesias, 1977).

If such reclassifications did not have real life consequences, they might be seen as trivial aberrations in the stream of life. However, this has not been the case; identification as Black or even as Hispanic/Puerto Rican or Latino has had economic, residential, social and even political consequences. Although the political consequences to race have been less well documented, it is clear that gerrymandering and voting prohibitions have both been used to suppress racial minorities. On an individual level, political consequences are also often a consequence of other forms of discrimination, e.g., housing, income. The real life consequences to such classifications in the U. S. -- regardless of phenotype -- were made quite explicit by a respondent in Oscar Lewis' La Vida; he said: "I'm so white that they've even taken me for a Jew, but when they see my Spanish name, they back right off."

(p. 180-1)

The respondent in the Oscar Lewis study was faced with the historical choice that many ethnic Americans met, i.e., whether to change their name and pass for non-ethnic or whether to keep their ethnic name and pay the consequences. For Puerto Ricans the process was more complicated. Another choice had to be made, i.e., whether to be of the "White" race or of the "Black" race. It appears that when Puerto Ricans first came they early perceived that there were two paths, to the white world and to the not-white world. Two realities seemed to be evident: choice of path was dependent on racial classification according to U. S. standards, and, race influenced the rewards to be gained from the system (i.e., housing, jobs, income). It seems that use of these standards would divide the group, negate the cultural existence of Puerto Ricans and ignore their expectation that they be treated irrespective of race, as a part of a culturally intact group. (Rodriguez, 1989)

Anticipated Assimilation Paths

The assumption or conclusion of many of the authors reviewed was that with greater time in the U. S., Puerto Rican racial attitudes would become more like those in the U. S. This point had early been made by Chenault (1970:151), who noted that "...the attitude of Puerto Ricans with regard to color seems to be affected by the length of residence in this country. It is the opinion of those who have studied the group for many years that the white Puerto Rican, after he has lived in New York for several years,

takes up what is described as the 'American attitude' on the question of color." Fitzpatrick (1971) also speculated about whether Puerto Rican open-ness on race would change in the U. S. and make for a division of the community into white and black. In other words, whether the race order in the U. S. would make for separate assimilation paths. The expectation was that this would eventually happen and that those who could not assimilate into the white communities, and who would not assimilate into the Black communities would remain as the standard bearers of the Puerto Rican community.

Handlin (1962:60ff) also articulated this possibility but added that a second possibility existed. This was that there would be a decline in color consciousness and that white and "colored" Puerto Ricans might "develop a coherent community to which newcomers would be added" through immigration. However, he pointed out that this possibility would depend not just on a decline in color consciousness but "in some part on the reactions of the larger community...As far as the Puerto Ricans were concerned, there seems to be a growing consciousness of, and pride in, their group identity. That may reflect their preference for the second alternative, if the penalties of following it do not become too great." Thus, it was anticipated that Puerto Ricans would become White or Black with greater time in the U. S. Alternatively, if Puerto Ricans were to retain a "coherent," i.e., an integrated, community they would have to pay a price and it would ultimately depend on the reactions of the larger community and on a decline

in color consciousness.

If we are to believe the results of the 1980 census, the community does not appear to have bifurcated. In New York, 44% of Puerto Rican women responded they were White, 3.9% said they were Black, while (48%) responded they were "Other" and wrote in a Spanish descriptor.[6] There were no significant differences by gender. (Rodriguez, 1989) The profile for the national Puerto Rican community in the U. S. is similar. Thus, it does not appear that Puerto Ricans who have migrated to the United States have taken on exclusively black and white racial identities as predicted. Puerto Ricans have not followed the anticipated assimilation paths. The question is whether their disadvantaged situation today indicates they have, instead, paid the price to which Handlin alluded?

Conclusion

In analyzing both the literary and social science literature, we have found a number of racial themes that illustrate the difficulties that arise when a multiracial group enters a biracial context with different racial conceptions, i.e., when two different racial classification systems collide. These difficulties have undoubtedly also been experienced by other groups that were, or became, multiracial cultural groups, e.g, Native American Indians, and Mexican Americans. The presence of increasing numbers of such groups in the U. S. populace will present a challenge -- by their mere presence -- to the biracial system in the United States.

* The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Karen Carrillo and Janet Guerrero as research assistants.

Endnotes

1. The particular spelling of "(im)migrant" is used to highlight the fact that, although Puerto Ricans are like previous immigrants to the U. S. in that they are foreign in culture, language and experience, they are different in that after 1917 they entered the country as citizens.

2. See Rodriguez (1989) for a description of the contrasting racial ambiences in Puerto Rico and in the U. S.

3. This ambiguity is reflected in the changing racial classifications that Hispanics have had in the U. S. census. According to Omi and Winant (1983:56), in 1930 Hispanics were included in the census as a racial category. In 1950 and 1960 they surfaced as "Persons of Spanish Mother Tongue." In 1970, they were "Persons of Both Spanish Surname and Spanish Mother Tongue." Finally, by 1980 a Hispanic self identifier separate from the race item was added to the 100% count of the decennial census.

4. The following incident exemplifies one of the many clashes Hispanics have had with the U. S. over racial definitions. When the 1990 census was being planned the issue of how Latinos should be counted was again raised by the Census Bureau and the suggestion was made that perhaps they should be counted as a separate racial group. This suggestion was defeated through strenuous community opposition. The proposal was strongly opposed "through the most aggressive campaign ever seen by the bureau." The Census agency officials decided to abandon the proposal fearing it would cause a withdrawal of needed community support. (Quote from McKenney, Director of the Bueau of the Census, cited in Hispanic Link Weekly Report, vol. 4:21 (May 26, 1986). In essence, Latinos rejected the conception that they should be counted as a separate race group.

5. See Omi & Winant (1983) for an excellent analysis of how social relations were transformed through political struggle over racial meanings.

4. An interesting conception of this continuum was advanced early on by Padilla, 1958:74, who argued that in Puerto Rico there was a biracial continuum, with the two poles being white and black. Although her premise was that there was an overarching biracial structure, she maintained that, contrary to the situation in the United States, the categories in the middle of the continuum were not caste-like and that one could experience mobility within one's lifetime from one group to the next.

5. Mills (1950) also found white men experienced a bimodal pattern, i.e, greater upward and downward mobility, as compared with the intermediate group, who tended to stay in semi-skilled and unskilled jobs both in New York and in Puerto Rico.

6. Another .1% said they were American Indian or Asian and 4.0% said they were "other" but did not write in a Spanish descriptor.

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